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New Optimism Expressed for European Help Against Soviets

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WASHINGTON

A senior National Security Council official expressed optimism Saturday that the Reagan administration can achieve "workable compromises" with its European allies over the touchy issue of economic sanctions against the Soviet Union.

Richard E. Pipes, a council expert on Soviet affairs, also asserted that the Kremlin is now enmeshed in an "unprecedented crisis" of economic, political and "imperial" proportions _ offering U.S. policymakers valuable opportunities to help curb Soviet global adventurism.

Pipes defended the administration's efforts to respond to Soviet-backed repression in Poland by striving to block a massive Siberian natural gas pipeline and to reduce the overall flow of Western credits and high technology to the Soviets.

He said this strategy was not intended to "bring the Soviet economy to its knees," but instead to force the Kremlin leadership to choose between a continued large-scale military buildup or the transfer of more resources to civilian economic development.

Pipes, a 59-year-old historian who is set to return within the next two months to his professorship at Harvard University, spoke at a convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, an organization of U.S. academic specialists on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Describing challenges facing the Kremlin, Pipes said: "I am quite convinced that the Soviet Union is in an unprecedented crisis. It is a crisis of a three-fold nature. First of all, an economic crisis. Secondly, a political crisis. And thirdly, an imperial crisis, or a crisis of the empire."

He noted that the overall Soviet economic growth rate has declined from roughly 4 percent a year during the 1950s to about 2 percent a year now. The economic picture has been marked by "a steady drop in productivity, both in industry and agriculture," Pipes said.

In the political sphere, he said, the Soviet government "finds itself increasingly unable to mobilize the masses, either by threats or by promises. ... It's a very dangerous situation," aggravated by corruption which "has reached absolutely endemic proportions in the Soviet system."

Pipes said Moscow's "crisis of empire" has resulted from "the overcommitment of resources to ever-greater adventures abroad on the basis of a shrinking economy."

He told the conference that according to CIA estimates, the cost to the Moscow of supporting "allied communist countries" in Eastern Europe and elsewhere has grown from about \$1 billion annually in the early 1970s to nearly \$14 billion in 1979 and almost \$24 billion as of two years ago.